

An Interpretation of Christ as the Sacrifice in Hebrews 9:26 to a Holistic Relationship with God

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Abstract

The sacrifice of Christ, which provides forgiveness of sins and the hope of being perfected, forms the foundation of Christian faith in the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews reflects the continuity between the old and the new covenants, interest in the earthly life of Christ, and the realisation that his sacrifice needs to be interpreted. Existing studies on issues in the interpretation of Hebrews have focused, primarily, on apparent internal tension of the document; while some scholars see Hebrews to be centred in a group of migrant Jewish Christians who await the fulfilment of the promise of Abraham in Jerusalem, others view the document as a polemic grounded in a Philonic-type milieu. A literal significance to the cultic language of Hebrews, especially Christ as the sacrifice and its contribution to the success of loving relationship in the contemporary society, has not been given adequate attention. The study, therefore, examines an interpretation of Christ as the sacrifice in Hebrews 9:26 with a view to establishing a holistic relationship with God. Using Saussure's approach to New Testament interpretation, the paper reveals that an interpretation of Christ as the sacrifice ultimately brings to bear a world of relationships. The richness and diversity of these relationships are experienced in human religious history through the vehicle of sacrifice. These relationships are identified between relations of persons to persons in a society and relations of a society to God. Christ's sacrifice of himself rather than a substitute stresses the superiority of his sacrifice to the Old Testament ritual and any other human rituals. Consequently, Christ as the sacrifice informs that he is the source of the relationship with God. The paper recommends that humanity could live sacrificially, although no person could offer the same sacrifice as Christ did, they can follow his example and offer their lives entirely to God as enshrined in Hebrews 9:26.

Keywords: Christ as the sacrifice, Cultic language of Hebrews, Holistic relationship, Interpretation of Hebrews 9:26

1. Introduction

1.1 Semantics of Hebrews 9:26: An introduction

The interpretive works of Hebrews, which refer to Delitzsch (1962), Wescott (1950), Moffat (1924), Spicq (1952) and Michel (1966), are the beacon of lights. Besides these interpreters, the appearance of George Wesley Buchanan (1972)'s *Commentary in the Anchor Bible* and Lala Kalyan Kumar Dey (1975)'s *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* reveals that the book of Hebrews continues to remain an enigma to interpreters. While Buchanan finds the document to be centred in a group of migrant Jewish Christians who await in Jerusalem the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, Dey sees it as a polemic grounded in a Philonic-type milieu! Obviously, the religious background to Hebrews continues to remain elusive.

On one hand, Buchanan opines that the people addressed in Hebrews seem more "Jewish" than "Christian"! He avers that these people are a group of migrants who have gathered at Jerusalem to await fulfilment of the promise which God made to Abraham; the land of Canaan is at last to be theirs. He posits that Hebrews is a *midrash* on Psalm 110 designed to encourage these waiting souls whose ardour is growing cold with the passing of the years (Note 1). For him, Jesus is an exemplary figure (not God) whose sacrificial death has so built up the treasury of merits of the Jewish nation that the ancient promise may now be realised; Christ death has made purification not only for the sins of Israel but for the sins of entire world as well. Furthermore, he infers that the Psalms which come later than the Pentateuch are thought to override it. For each era there are corresponding temples, sacrifices, covenants and leaders but those of the later era supersede the earlier ones. This explains the basis of contrasts of Hebrews: Christ and Moses, Christ and Aaron, the two

covenants, the two sanctuaries and the two types of sacrifice. Linking both eras, however, is the promise of “rest,” which was the original promise of the land, given to Abraham. In the context of Hebrews, this was not fulfilled by either Joshua or the Davidic monarchy. Now, however, the sacrifice of Jesus has opened the way for its realisation for those who are “perfect”. This is why no sin may be permitted of a member of the brotherhood. The Messiah who is a Priest-King (Not of Davidite) has brought deliverance from Roman rule.

On the other hand, Dey attempts to illumine the first seven chapters of Hebrews with special emphasis on the series of comparisons of Jesus as Son with the angels, Heavenly man, Moses, Aaron, Levi and Melchizedek. He avers that this entire argument is understandable on the basis of a single religious thought-world that to be found in the Hellenistic Judaism, and especially in the writings of Philo Judaeus. Here angels, *logos*, heavenly man and wisdom constitute the intermediary world between God and man. The revelation and religious status of this intermediary world, however, are inferior to that of “perfection” which is characterised by unmediated and direct access to God. Among those who had attained to “perfection” were Moses (he communicated with God face to face), Aaron as he entered the Holy of Holies (divesting himself of the robe of the universe), Isaac (whose wisdom was self-taught), and Melchizedek. Allegorically, the upper limits of heaven (where God dwells) characterise this realm. The letter to the Hebrews endeavours to establish the superiority of Jesus to readers steeped in such ideas. This explains in particular the concern to prove the superiority of Jesus over the angels and Moses—two comparisons that long have puzzled the interpreters of the document.

A critical examination of Dey’s classical volume of the interpretation of Hebrews entitled, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection* shows that there is a great deal which Dey left untouched in his important interpretation. For instance, he has not been able to extend his series of comparisons beyond the seventh chapter of Hebrews least the selected biblical text ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καθολικῆς κόσμου· νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν [τῆς] ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανέρωται “For then he [Christ] would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice” in Hebrews 9:26 neither fit into Dey’s schema nor given attention by Buchanan’s *Commentary in the Anchor Bible*. The paper, therefore, identifies this gap in the interpretation of the letter to the Hebrews. It adopts Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory, which posits that “the linguist who wishes to understand a state (*état de langue*) must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony; he can enter the mind of the speakers only by completely suppressing the past” and attempts to interpret Ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice” in Hebrews 9:26 and the application of this in a holistic relationship with God (Thiselton, 1977, p. 80).

2. Sacrifice as a Metaphor

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, metaphor is an expression which describes a person or object in a literary way by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to the person or object one is trying to describe (Roach, Hartman and Setter, 2003, p. 1115). Metaphor is one of the central means by which truth is discovered and expressed. Aristotle teaches that metaphor is what happens when a term is transferred from one context to another (Poetics, 1457b 7-8). It is this feature of language which makes the expression of new truth possible, for without the new use of old language there could be no new knowledge and discovery. Discovery is not only dependent on change of language; it comes to be by means of it. One feature of a very complex term in the philosophy of language will take us to the heart of the title of the paper. To describe Ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice” is to use a metaphor. Sacrifice seems to be defined most essentially as the offering up of a gift, which is typically animal, to God. Nelson avers that “to offer something as sacrifice is to transfer it out of the realm of human use and disposal into the domain of God” (Nelson, 2003, p. 252). *Burnt offerings*, *peace/fellowship offerings* and *the Passover sacrifice* are the earliest types of Old Testament animal sacrifice, all of them established before the erection of the tabernacle or the consecration of the priesthood, and they continue to be the most basic types in Israel worship thereafter. These various types of Old Testament animal sacrifice are made fulfilled in Christ’s “appearing in the presence of God on our behalf” (Hebrews 9:24): Christ is represented as *the suffering servant* of Isaiah 52-53, *the slain lamb of God* (burnt offering, peace/fellowship), *offering and sin or guilt offering of God*, whose precious blood (offering of blood in the Holy of Holies by the high priest on the Day of Atonement) takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) (Beckwith, 2000, pp. 756-761). Christ is really the sacrifice, and to acknowledge the metaphorical character of the claim is in no way to endanger the doctrine. It does not require pointing out that the description of Ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice” is central to the New Testament’s presentation of him. It is also clearly a metaphorical use of language. For instance, there is no altar, but a cross; he is killed by soldiers not (John 11:50) by priests and there is no provision in the sacrificial regulations as they appear in the canon of the Old Testament for the sacrifice of a human being. In this sense, it is probable that Christ’s death both is and is not a sacrifice. The metaphorical nature of the language is also manifest in the fact that the writers conflate and adapt different aspects of the Old Testament background, as in the use of Leviticus 16 in Hebrews and in the combination of Passover and sin offerings in the imagery of the Johannine tradition.

Frances Young (1983) posits that various strands of the Old Testament language of sacrifice are applied to Jesus in different ways. Archetypically, metaphorical expression involves the central Aristotelian activity of transferring language from one context to another. Also, it is worth noting that the language of sacrifice rarely appears as the sole metaphor, even in Hebrews. On this Whale says:

In our modern world sacrifice has become a mere figure of speech. Parents sacrifice themselves for their children; a politician may sacrifice a career for a principle; ... In the ancient world sacrifice was no figure of speech but stark fact; the solemn taking and surrendering of the warm blood of life itself; the ritual slaughter of bullock or goat, lamb or pigeon at an altar. It asserted the powerful religious efficacy of shed blood. Ancient man took the necessity of blood-sacrifice for granted. Indeed, sacrifice is as ancient and universal as religion itself; it expresses the ultimate concern of the human race.... But modern man finds this very idea revolting; on more than one ground (Whale, 1960, p. 42).

It is probable that sacrificial metaphors would be used to attempt to express the significance of Christ; can we continue seriously to use such language of Christ? To phrase the question in ways which echo the progress of the paper so far: Does the metaphor of sacrifice enable us to cut the world at its joints, to bring to bear a holistic relationship with God? While Card submits that “any statement, literal or metaphorical, may be true or false, and its referent may be real or unreal;” (Card, 1980, p. 131) Douglas speaks chiefly of purity and defilement rather than of sacrifice. However, the parallel is clear. Ancient and modern ideas of purity are, like ancient notions of sacrifice, concerned with dimensions of human living in the world. But far from being irrational concerns, their primary focus is to be found in their occupation with the order of creation. Hence, where Old Testament scholars have regularly found themselves perplexed at, or dismissive of, the classifications of clean and unclean creatures in Leviticus, Douglas indicates a crucial key. “Holiness means keeping distinct the categories of creation ... It, therefore, involves correct definition, discrimination and order” (Douglas, 1984, p. 53).

Rogerson avers that all sacrifices in the Old Testament depend, for their context, upon the story of God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt at the Exodus (Rogerson, 1980, p. 57). The point can be expanded. Sacrifice only means what it does in the context of the giving of the law, and all that it implies for the life of the covenant people. Similarly, the prescriptions for sacrifice in Leviticus cannot merely be understood anthropologically in terms of a system of pollution and taboo, but must be seen theologically in terms of the holiness of Israel’s God. Notably, ἀκάθαρτος connotes “unclean or impure,” while καθαρότης is rendered “cleanness or purity used in Leviticus sense in Hebrews 9:13.” In addition, ἁγιασμός denotes “holiness” and καθαρός is rendered “free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless or clean” in the context of Hebrews. The exploration of the notion of sacrifice ultimately leads us not only to the notion of a story, but to that of a world of relationships.

Two related conclusions are evident in extending Rogerson’s submission to the New Testament language of sacrifice. First, the Old Testament provides the matrix within which the language works. Metaphor, as we have seen, involves transfer, and its use requires a context from which to transfer. And with the transfer, some of the old connotations are carried over into the new usage. At the very least, we shall expect to find taken up into New Testament usage some of the relational considerations that operated so centrally in Israel’s institutions. Second, the referent for the language is changed: not now a dead animal but a human being whose life and more particularly death becomes that from which the transferred meaning takes its centre. This means that the metaphor is successful if it achieves its end of bringing to expression, with the help of such associations brought from the old context, aspects of the reality of Jesus Christ.

Theological language is that language in which the relations of God with his world are expressed. The relations are many sided, partly because of the all-encompassing reality expressed by the word God, partly because of the richness and diversity of relationships experience in human religious history and partly because of the inadequacy of any one word or group of words to express the reality of the divine-human encounter. But salient features of the relationship are abstracted by the use of a variety of central terms. Sacrifice is one of these, and has served to express not just a salient feature of the network of relationships, but a number of similar features which it is appropriate to designate by the same word. Having discussed sacrifice as a metaphor it may be expedient to attempt the background of Hebrews; this may be helpful in the understanding of the context in which ὁ Χριστός ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as a sacrifice” is rendered in the selected biblical text.

3. The Background

The language of the cult impregnates the entire book of Hebrews. For instance, the cultic expressions that are evident in the book of Hebrews include (i) the Son “made purification for sins” (Hebrews 1:3); (ii) “by it the many become defiled” (Hebrews 12:15) and (iii) “let the marriage bed be undefiled (Hebrews 13:4). Besides, exhortations are couched in cultic terminology (Note 2). How seriously is this language to be taken, and what intent of the book does it serve? This is the issue of the valence (value) of the terminology adopted in Hebrews. Buchanan contends that the “sacrifice” of Jesus was

a real one; the heavenly temple stood immediately above the earthly, linked by the smoke of the sacrifice; Jesus' ascension was in the smoke sacrifice; his sacrifice provided a cleansing of the heavenly temple, which had been defiled by sins on earth; the Zion to which the believers had come was literal Jerusalem; and the severe warnings of Hebrews permit of no sin after baptism (Buchanan, 1972, pp. 9-263).

Hebrews describes the significance of Jesus as both high priest and victim. Hebrews argues that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice of himself as great high priest is more effective than the repetitive Jewish sacrifices. Indeed, Jesus' high priestly act of offering his own blood is so effective that no further sacrifice is needed. Hebrews reveals that blood sacrifice has come to an end. Apparently, so has the hierarchical structure created and sustained by sacrifice come to an end. Hebrews does not, however, end the logic of sacrifice. For Hebrews, forgiveness of sins was obtained through Jesus' high priestly offering. The effects of Jesus' sacrifice continue to be available for humans.

Harold Attridge says, "Hebrews is not explicitly interested in the Herodian temple and contemporary high priests, but in the Torah and the cultic system of the desert tabernacle that it portrays" (Attridge, 1989, p. 8). The idea that the actual practices, as adapted from the Levitical law, are not the concern of the author is further supported by the way the author blends not only the two sacrificial rituals (Christ's sacrifice and the Levitical sacrificial cultus), but also priestly ordination and covenantal sacrifice (Eberhart, 2005, p. 58). Rather than focusing on historical accuracy, Hebrews seems to be making use of a familiar framework to emphasise the uniqueness of Christ's work.

Hebrews reveals that Christ's sacrificial actions are exceptional in terms of the offering, its location and its efficacy. First, Hebrews declares that Christ, acting as high priest, offers "himself" and "his own blood" before the altar (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 14 and 25). Christ is pure in Spirit and at the same time is not a victim yet an *offerer* that does not only undermine the cycle of victimisation, but he renders the sacrifice a lasting atonement. Christ is not made a sacrifice against his will, but enters into the role willingly. Second, Hebrews informs that Christ, as high priest, "went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation." On this, Craddock (1995) infers that the analogy between earthly and heavenly sanctuaries should not be pressed too far. It is evident that what Levitical priest had done on earth was limited by and to their earthly locus, but Christ acting as the high priest entered the heavenly realm and his own work did not face the same limitation. Third, Hebrews establishes that Christ's sacrifice is effective "once and for all." The end of the offering of sacrifices is indicated vividly by Christ's "sitting down" at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12), as opposed to the way Levitical priests were instructed to stand before the altar (Deuteronomy 10:8 and 18:7). Not only is the sacrificial cultus ended, but the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice lasts and does not need to be repeated. This lasting power is highlighted as a sharp distinction to the sin offerings, which were offered daily or yearly (Note 3).

Hardin argues that Hebrews actually undermines and critiques the sacrificial system of the old law, but Eberhart infers that, "the total denial of the validity of the Judean sacrificial cult in Hebrews 10:4 is inconsistent with Hebrews' own argument in Hebrews 9:13, there is the effectiveness of this cult in the foundation of the metaphor of Christ's sacrifice" (Eberhart, 2005, p. 60).

Cockerill (2012) avers that Hebrews is a document probably written to Christians with Hellenistic Jewish associations or practices. Beyond this, the authorship, provenance, date and even genre are matters of debate (Koester, 2001, p. 25). However, despite these uncertainties Hebrews is immensely important for reconstructing the early church's Christology. For instance, Hebrews is the only New Testament book which calls Jesus our high priest.

Hebrews reveals the Christian majority and the non-Christian minority that became compatible bedfellows. The Jewish Christians had so much compromised their faith and sense of stewardship that the two groups could dine and wine together at the table of corruptive practices and incredible rituals. Neither group seriously troubled the conscience of the other. The preaching of the Christian group no longer resulted in conviction and decision on the part of the non-Christian group in the society. The Christians were in a state of stagnation because of their unwillingness to pay the price of full identification with Christianity: Christians' unwillingness to accept the full demands of courageous Christian living. The unbelievers had become hardened by continual rejection to the point of utter indifference. Dunnill assesses Hebrews, not as an argument, but as an act of symbolic communication expressing the possibility of direct communion with God (Dunnill, 2005, pp. 6 & 48). Therefore, an attempt to do exegesis of Hebrews 9:26 can facilitate clear understanding of the metaphorical language employed in Hebrews 9:26.

4. Exegesis

An attempt to do exegesis of the selected biblical text demands that it should be stated as follows: ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καθάβολῆς κόσμου· νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν [τῆς] ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θύσιας αὐτοῦ πεφανέρωται "For then he [Christ] would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

Can exegesis of Hebrews 9:26 enable us to cut the world at its joints, to bring to bear a holistic relationship with God? The high priest even on the Day of Atonement could offer no sacrifice, which could even ἀφαιρῆναι “put away” sin, but Christ’s sacrifice was able ἀθετεῖν “to annul” sin altogether (Hebrews 10:4). The term ἀθέτησις, which is often rendered “putting away,” connotes an abrogation, disannulling, destroying and disarming. In Hebrews 7:18 ἀθέτησις is used of permanent displacement, removal, or setting aside, that is, abolition, τῆς ἁμαρτίας of sin, in its most general and comprehensive sense, all sin (Note 4). In the context of Hebrews, ἀθέτησις refers to taking away the force, power, and obligation of a law. Basically in Romans 8:2, “the law of sin” denotes the power of sin, as to all its effects and consequences, whether sinful or penal. This law, as of others, has two remarkable sections dealing with powers which include (i) **its obligation to punishment**, also called “the law of death,” (after the nature of all penal laws) is that which sinners are bound over to eternal death; and (ii) **its impelling, ruling power**, subjectively in the minds of men, leading them captive into all enmity and disobedience to God (Romans 7:23). Consequently, Christ’s appearance abrogates this law of sin and deprives it of its power in two ways. First, the law of sin could neither *condemn* Christ’s disciples any more, nor bind them over to punishment. Christ abrogates this law principally by making atonement for it, undergoing in his own suffering the penalty due to it; which of necessity He was to suffer as often as He offered himself. Second, the *destruction of the law of sin’s subjective power*, by purging our consciences from dead works, as enshrined in (1 John 3:8). This was the principal end of Christ’s appearance in the world which He accomplished holistically διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ “through his sacrifice” for ἑαυτοῦ “Himself”: that sacrifice wherein He both suffered and offered Himself to God. This simple subjective genitive, διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ “through his sacrifice,” draws attention not to the nature of the sacrifice, but to its three characteristics (the annulling of sin, its total destruction, the counteraction of all its effects), that it was made once-for-all, in the consummation, for sin’s abolition. Notably, there are various types of sacrifices outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures; Hebrews primarily makes use of imagery from the sin offering and the Day of Atonement, both of which support the goal of coming before God by removing “obstacles that threaten the relationship between God and His people” (Nelson, 2003, p. 257) (Note 5). These obstacles are the unintentional sins of individuals and of Israel (Note 6). In addition, the statement εἰς ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας “for the annulment of sin” proclaims full deliverance from guilt and penalty and from the hold of sin itself—a deliverance which the sin-offering could but express in figure. Therefore, into this statement, εἰς ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας “for the annulment of sin,” is concentrated the infinite superiority of the work of Christ.

Ἡ σκέσις μεταξύ των προσώπων/ἐθνους προς θεον (relationship between persons/nation to God) is central in ὁ Χριστός ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice.” An attempt to examine the way Christ is cast in the sacrificial construct of Hebrews reveals the roles within a sacrifice which include (i) victim, (ii) beneficiary, and (iii) priest; among these roles Christ takes the first and the last. The roles of victim and priest are merged so that the one who dies as the source of the blood is also the one entering into the Holy of Holies to bring that offering before God (Hebrews 9:12). The offering described for the Day of Atonement is done for the cleansing of the priest, but far beyond this, Christ’s sacrifice is effective for all those on whose behalf his blood has been offered. The description of ὁ Χριστός ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice” follows the same “ritual script” of Israelite sacrifice: “the death of the victim, passage by the priest into the realm of the holy, and the use of blood to effect purification and to create a covenantal relationship” (Nelson, 2003, p. 252). For Apostle Peter, the object of the sacrifice was to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). As in the manifestation before the face of God we see the proof that the goal, which the human high priest failed to reach, had been attained. The relations of person to person in Israel are comprehended within the relations of them all to God, and the sacrifices are to do with the ordering of those relationships. For instance, sacrifices are to do with the establishing and re-establishing of the focus of Israel’s life as a people. On such an understanding, the prophetic critique takes its place within that same network of relationships, anticipating the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews by highlighting the inadequacy of the sacrificial forms in themselves to secure true order in divine-human and consequently human-human relations. The term τάξις denotes an arranging, arrangement and order, while τάγμα signifies that which has been arranged in order. The word τάγμα is used metaphorically in 1 Corinthians 15:23 of the various classes of those who have part in the first revelation. If we take the notion of order of wholeness, completeness, particularly in relation to God as a first clue to the significance of a sacrifice, we shall have a foundation on which to build. Sacrifice has to do at least in part with ἡ τάγμα καὶ ἡ ἀναδιάταξις τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς “the ordering or reordering of human life” both in relation to God and in the cosmos. We may now be bound to use the term metaphorically, but this need not be at the expense of this feature of the former usage. Part of the connotations carried over from old to new usage may be the continuity of this concern with the rightness of the way life is ordered in the cosmos.

The Old Testament sacrifice was concerned with ἡ τάγμα καὶ ἡ ἀναδιάταξις “the ordering and reordering” of Israel’s relation with the covenant keeping God. The claim that ὁ Χριστός ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as the sacrifice or Christ is the sacrifice” implies that ὁ Χριστός εἶναι ἡ πηγή τῆς σκέσεως παρα τῷ θεῷ “Christ is now the source of the relationship with God,” as once the sacrificial system had sought to be, but in such a way that the old system is at once fulfilled and superseded. How can the life and death of a man, for part of the transfer of meaning requires that we include the life and not just the death in our interpretation, be conceived to reorder human relationships with God? The Letter to the

Hebrews 8:8-12 argues that such a reordering has in fact been achieved, and claims the fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:31-34, "I will put my law into their minds, and write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." He claims, that is to say, that something real happens in the divine-human relationship, such that there is achieved what was not achieved by the slaughter of bulls and goats.

A major instance of metaphorical reordering is one of the important ways of understanding ἡ θυσία ἐστὶν καθὼς τὸ δῶρον "sacrifice is as gift." In some religious systems, sacrifice is understood as gift in which to appease or "buy off" the deity, but in the Bible more as a gift to the almighty God who by virtue of what he is cannot be bought. When Christ is conceived of as sacrifice, the notion of gift remains, but both the nature of the giver and the means of its giving are radically changed: transferred from one context to another. The most radical aspect of the change is that there is a complete reversal of roles, in that the primary giver is God and not man. This is particularly evident in many Pauline expressions, perhaps notably the much debated "whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood" (Romans 3:25), but it is everywhere the implicit or explicit assumption of New Testament expression. In turn, this has moulded what is in many ways the chief difference between ancient and modern uses of the word sacrifice. To say, for example, that a politician sacrificed his career for a principle is to concentrate on sacrifice as a cost of some kind to the *sacrificer*, which is the kind of point Paul is making when he sees God through Christ as paying the price of human rebellion against himself.

The stressing of God's sacrificial giving up of his Son could have, and has had, unfortunate theological consequences, especially if it is construed, with the penal imagery, in terms of God's visiting upon the human Jesus the penalties owed by others. A theologically intolerable doctrine of penal substitution can be avoided if the other shift in the meaning of the sacrificial gift is also stressed. The New Testament in expression of the second metaphorical transfer is given in Ephesians 5:2 "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." In spite of the Letter to the Hebrews stresses so strongly ἡ δωρεά "the spiritual gift" instead of τὸ δῶρον "the gift," it is necessary to note that it is not the imposed death of a beast, but the voluntary self-giving of Jesus. This is true of the author of Hebrews when he says, Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας, γευσάμενους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews 6:4). And the giving is not simply the death, but the death as the completion of a life in obedience to God. In this sense, ἡ θυσία ἐστὶν καθὼς ἡ δωρεά is rendered "sacrifice is as gift." Hebrews emphasises that Christ, acting as high priest, offers "himself" and "his own blood" before the altar (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 14 and 25). This gift, compared to the blood of slaughtered animals, is superior as follows: on one hand, Christ is pure in spirit and so does not contain the "contagion of sin" which may have been assumed about the sacrifice (Holmes, 2009, p. 247); on the other hand, Christ is not a victim, but rather an "offerer," which not only undermines the cycle of victimisation, but also renders the sacrifice a lasting atonement (Hardin, 2000, p. 105). Jesus Christ is not made a sacrifice against his will, but enters into the role intentionally. Thus, Jesus offers to the Father the human life that the others of us have failed to live in the context of ἡ θυσία ἐστὶν καθὼς ἡ δωρεά. But to what end? "It is for this reason that the New Testament so constantly employs the language of sacrifice to declare the benefits of the Cross ..." Hence, "the imperative need of those whom sin has defiled is that which can cleanse the conscience from dead works (Hebrews 9:14)" But how can this be conceived to happen without establishing a perfect relationship with God? Jesus Christ διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ "through his sacrifice" facilitates this holistic relationship with God. Indeed, ὁ Χριστός εἶναι ἡ πηγή τῆς σκέσης παρα τῷ θεῷ "Christ is the source of the relationship with God."

5. Conclusion

Interpretation of Hebrews 9:26 reveals that Christ was both the ideal high priest and sacrificial victim; his sacrifice was once-for-all, holy, perfect and acceptable to God. The understanding of Christ's salvific work is sacrificial and the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice can in fact be exhausted for any particular individual or nation to facilitate holistic relationships with God. Everyone could imitate Christ by making him/herself a victim. If imitation of Jesus is at the centre of Christian life, and if Jesus' greatest act, indeed his only act of any importance, is his obedient sacrificial death, the way to imitate Jesus becomes to sacrifice oneself, even to the point of death. Christians focus on ὁ Χριστός ὡς ἡ θυσία "Christ as a sacrifice" suggests that being an unblemished victim is pleasing to God; that God wants humanity to partake in a world of relationships which is made possible διὰ τῆς θυσίας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ "through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ." These relationships include relations of persons to persons in a society and relations of a society to God. Thus, the metaphor of sacrifice enables us to cut the world at its joints, to bring to bear a holistic relationship with God.

It is evident that sacrificial metaphors in Hebrew 9:26 could be used to express the significance of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. The reason is that in spite of sacrificial metaphors used to commemorate those who had undergone political executions in the world none has proved to be the high priest and the offering simultaneously, nor was the sacrifice of any individual capable to annul the sins of humankind. Hebrews reveals the inadequacy of the sacrificial forms in

themselves to secure true order in divine-human and consequently human-human relations. Therefore, the metaphor ὁ Χριστός ὡς ἡ θυσία “Christ as a sacrifice” brings to bear both the infinite superiority of Jesus Christ over all other sacrificers/victims, the supreme gift from God to humankind ἡ θυσία ἐστὶν καθὼς ἡ δωρεά “sacrifice is as gift” and the unique work of Christ in a world of relationships, that is, ὁ Χριστός εἶναι ἡ πηγή τῆς σκέσης παρα τῷ θεῷ “Christ is the source of the relationship with God.” In order to partake in this holistic relationship which Christ has established, humanity could live sacrificially (though no person could offer the same sacrifice as Christ did, but they can follow his example) as well as offer their lives entirely to God as enshrined in Hebrews 9:26, the paper recommends.

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Notes

1. Midrash is a method of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal or moral teachings. It fills in gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are hinted at. For instance, Midrash is an early Jewish interpretation of biblical text clarifying or expounding a point of law.
2. The exhortation is προσέρχομαι to “draw near” (Hebrews 10:22). This term is often used for the approach of the priest to God. See Hebrews 4:16.
3. According to Craddock interpreters are divided as to how far to press the analogy in Hebrews 9:23. Animal sacrifices purify the earthly sanctuary... Does this mean that the better sacrifice of Christ purifies the heavenly sanctuary? If thus pressed, then there is sin or impurity in the heavenly realm in need of cleansing... It seems wiser to take the analogy in a broad and general sense, to understand that Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary with a better sacrifice, that is himself, but to draw no more detailed comparisons than the writer does in the verses that follow Hebrews 24-26.
4. While referring to the concept of sin, the author of Hebrews intends the whole of its nature and effects, in its root and fruits, in its guilt, power, and punishment; sin *absolutely and universally*; sin as it was an apostasy of sin as unto all its effects and consequents from God, as it was the cause of all distance between God and us, as it was the work of the devil; sin in all that it was and all that it could effect, or all the consequents of it; sin in its whole empire and dominion, — as it entered by the fall of Adam, invaded our nature in its power, oppressed our persons with its guilt, filled the whole world with its fruits, gave existence and right unto death and hell, with power to Satan to rule in and over mankind; sin, that rendered us obnoxious unto the curse of God and eternal punishment.
5. Priestly ordination and covenant-making sacrifice are both referenced as well, but with focus on the sacrifice and more on the effects.
6. Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22 and 27 refer to the sin offering, which is made for the unintentional sins of the individuals, group or leader. No mention is made there of “intentional” sins, and specification is not offered about the nature of an unintentional sin.



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